Issues of Ethnicity and Identity in the Post-Communist Context

Introduction to Post-Communist Social Change, 3 April 2013
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Discussion of:

- The new situation after 1989
- Different roots and forms of nationalism
- Minorities historically and now
- International organisations’ concerns
- Reasons for nationalist politics, and…
- Ways of overcoming it

- Claus Offe (1996): Triple transformation: the change is deeper than previous processes of democratization in former authoritarian societies. Along with democratization, also change of economic system and a change in culture and identity
  * New states were created: dissolution of USSR and the “mini-empires” of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia
  * but also the old states came to look upon themselves in new ways – as parts of the West rather than the “Second World”.
  - If democracy means the power of the people, the first question is who belong to the people.
    * new states: define the borders, define the citizenry. Old states: what is the status of émigré/exiled countrymen in the restitution of nationalised property? The future of irredentas – change borders? Grant citizenship for ethnic kinsmen in neighbouring countries? (Hungary: “All Hungarians” are the “nation”; Moldovans take Rumanian citizenship, Macedonians take Bulgarian; Russian citizenship granted for former USSR citizens from other countries too);
    “ethnic cleansing”/”decolonisation” (encouraging representatives of other ethnicities to leave); possibilities of territorial autonomies and their borders? Federal structures (in Czechoslovakia when federalised, the question why only 2 federal states, not Moravian, Rusins, Slovakian Hungarian representation)?
  - Need to define one’s relations with international organisations and neighbours (the resurrection of Austro-Hungarian identity; Estonia as Post-Soviet, Baltic, Nordic or something else?)
  - New views upon one’s own history (to what extent was the period of Real Socialism something that the nation itself was responsible for? Was the 50 years period just an interlude? Views on Nazi occupations and collaboration, views on the expulsion of Germans after the War)

- The rise of ethnicity issues and nationalisms to the fore is one of the aspects of the transformation that has received most attention
  * A “surprise” for Western researchers in late 1980s. The USSR claimed to have solved “the nationality question” – a view that many accepted. For some nationalities, the Soviet regime
had been the one to create a literary language and a “high culture”, even if ideologically coloured and with Russian influences. Outside, the protests of e.g. Baltic nationalists were known, but they were mainly dismissed as anachronistic, without a future
* the nationality question was usually not seen as problematic, rather the economy
* After the foundation of the predecessor of the EU in 1952, it was thought that nationalism belongs to the past. It was thought that a contemporary state is ethnically neutral – Grundgesetz patriotismus = Constitutional Patriotism had substituted loyalty to an ethnic group

- Forms in which nationalism has emerged are usually divided into two: political/civic vs cultural nationalisms
* After the French Revolution of 1789, “nation” started to be seen as the bearer of sovereignty, not the sovereign (the King, Prince etc) himself. The nation was defined as citizens of an existing state (e.g., Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1712-1778). This was what happened in most western European nation states (meaning here states with a unitary centralised administration). Local identities were replaced by a national identity, with the assistance of schools, military service etc. this also meant an assimilation of other ethnic groups (Bretons, Occitans, etc). E.g., Eugen Weber (1976): Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914.
- Another form of nationalism was not based on existing political entities but on culture and language. One of its early proponents was the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). Germany did not exist then as a unified state (unification 1871), so “nation” was the common language and cultural heritage

- In Central and Eastern Europe before the First World War, there were three large states that were not nation states, but multinational empires that were held together by the Monarch’s person: Austria-Hungary, Russia, the Ottoman Empire.
- The Austrian Emperor was also the King of Hungary (K. und K.), other parts and ethnic groups had a more subjugated status
- With the modernization, a synthesis of cultural and political nationalisms was born. Ernest Gellner’s definition: “Nationalism is primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent”. Nationalism only appeared and, Gellner argues, became a sociological necessity in the modern world. In previous times rulers had little incentive to impose cultural homogeneity on the ruled. But in modern society, work becomes technical. One must operate a machine, and as such one must learn. There is a need for impersonal communication and cultural standardisation => Germanification, Magyarisation, Russification in A-H and Russia, and nationalist movements among the minorities
- After WW II, a number of new nation states was created in CEE.

- This did not solve minority problems. Many of the new or re-sized states continued to have sizeable minorities (e.g. Poland), and also irredentas outside their borders (e.g., Hungarians, Germans). Some groups continued to be dispersed around the region (Jews, Roma)
- Both during the interwar era, and during the communist rule, policies aimed at ethnic unification were carried out (assimilation; expulsion; resettlement).
* After WW II, especially the mass expulsion of Germans from Poland & Czechoslovakia & East Prussia (now partly Soviet Kaliningrad oblast’, partly Polish)

- The situation in the beginning of the 1990s had some resemblance with that of after the First World War.
## SIGNIFICANT MINORITIES IN POST-COMMUNIST STATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Majority group (proportion of the total population)</th>
<th>Significant minorities (proportion of the total population; proportion relative to the proportion of the dominant group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>Belarussians (81.2%)</td>
<td>Russians (11.4%; 14.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Bulgarians (83.9%)</td>
<td>Turks (3.4%; 11.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Roma (4.7%; 5.6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>Croats (89.6%)</td>
<td>Serbs (4.5%; 5.02%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Estonians (67.9%)</td>
<td>Russians (25.6%; 37.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Kazakhs (53.4%)</td>
<td>Russians (30%; 56.17%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Uzbeks (13.8%; 21.26%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Russians (12.5%; 19.26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>Latvians (57.7%)</td>
<td>Russians (29.6%; 51.29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Lithuanians (83.4%)</td>
<td>Polish (6.7%; 8.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Russians (6.3%; 7.55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>Macedonians (64.2%)</td>
<td>Albanians (25.2%; 39.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>Moldovans/Romanians (78.2%)</td>
<td>Gagauz (4.4%; 5.62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Romanians (89.5%)</td>
<td>Hungarians (6.6%; 7.37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Slovaks (85.8%)</td>
<td>Hungarians (9.7%; 11.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>Tajiks (79.9%)</td>
<td>Uzbeks (15.3%; 19.14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Ukrainians (77.8%)</td>
<td>Russians (17.3%; 22.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>Uzbeks (80%)</td>
<td>Russians (5.5%; 6.87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tajiks (5%; 6.25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- By many international organisations (Conference for European Security and Cooperation (CSCE), later OSCE), the EEC (later the EU), Council of Europe (CoE), this was considered a risk for peace and stability (as in the Yugoslavian conflict) => much attention on minority protection

* The Copenhagen Criteria for EU enlargement laid down in 1993:
  
  Membership requires that candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.

* The CoE Membership also was made conditional on democracy, rule of law, minority rights

* CoE Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages are signed by most (but not by all) CoE members. However, they leave the signing states rather free hands in defining what is a national minority or a minority language (e.g., immigrant groups often excluded).

* CSCE had a High Commissioner of National Minorities (1993-2001), Max van der Stoel, who monitored minority policies in CEE countries and gave recommendations. As an intergovernmental organisation, CSCE did not recommend secession. He also avoided territorial solutions (autonomy) to minority problems and recommended educational, cultural, social policies to ensure cultural rights – measures of multiculturalism

* until the EU accessions (2004 and 2007), the Commission of the EU annually monitored candidate countries’ policies in Progress Reports, among them also minority policies

* The candidate countries sometimes accused EU for “double standards”: the requirements set for new members were such that the old countries themselves did not live up to

* In my opinion, the possibilities for international monitoring of minority rights were better before the accession, because EU as a whole lacks coherent minority policies

- Irrespective of positive changes and lack of outright ethnic conflict in most parts of the region, ethnicity tends to play a rather important part in the politics of post-communist countries.

* All the new constitutions refer to the state as a guardian and self-expression of a “nation” with certain cultural features and a certain language

* Appeals to national pride and discussions of minorities as “Fifth Columns” or as “parasites” (esp. the Roma)

* “Ethnic democracy” (Danny Smooha, refers originally to Israel): a political system that combines a structured ethnic dominance with democratic, political and civil rights for all. One part is the “core nation”, the state perceives non-core groups as a threat and controls them

  # Estonia and Latvia have sometimes been described as ethnic democracies because of the high proportion of non-citizens in population (7.5% for Estonia). This claim has also been contested, as the citizenship legislation does not have explicit links to ethnicity but to the citizenship status of the person or his/her parents in 1940 (although in practice, most Estonians and Latvians received citizenship on this basis automatically in 1992, while most Russians did not).

- Two explanations: “The Sleeping Beauty” and “Frankenstein’s Bride”. Cf. primordialist-modernist theories of nationalism: are “nations” something that have existed always, as ethnic groups that people are aware of and identify with, or did this particular form of group identity become relevant for people only as a result of the modernisation development (the stance that Gellner represents)?
the stance one adopts in this question will affect one’s view on CEE nationalisms: is nationalism something that has always been and always will be there? In that case one tends to say that conflicts (such as in Yugoslavia) were/are inevitable. Or, is nationalism, especially an aggressive form of it, a result of specific social, political and historical circumstances, and as such, a passing phenomenon?

=> “The Sleeping Beauty”: nationalism existed all the time but was suppressed by the regimes; or

=> “Frankenstein’s Bride”: nationalism was created by the new (partly the old) rulers to legitimate their politics and get voter support

- Whatever the strength of nationalist feelings was before, the upsurge of ethnic politics in 1980s-1990s-2000s can be explained rationally:
  1) need to get legitimacy for the new political institutions => legitimacy through appeals to nationalism;
  2) underdevelopment of civil society => lack of other important group identities
  3) lack of tolerance and pluralism in political culture => tendency to divide between “us” and “others”
  4) choice between “hope” and “pride” => during economic hardship, more “pride” (Offe 1996: 63)

- Means of overcoming ethnic politics:
  Institutional:
  * peaceful institutional solutions (roundtable negotiations, international mediators, autonomies, rights) are possible when (and only when) all parties agree
  * one-sided solutions (secession, ethnic cleansing) involve conflict

Evolutionary: According to Offe 1996, development is the best possibility:
  1) learning from mistakes – all partiiess get tired of fighting (e.g., Northern Ireland);
  2) class politics substitute ethnic politics: when capitalism is consolidated, class interests become more important than ethnic interests (but nationalism can be used in order to hide class interests);
  3) multiple identities emerge: economic, local, European, religious, subcultural, generational… are important in different situations, without any one of them being always the most important one

**Literature:**